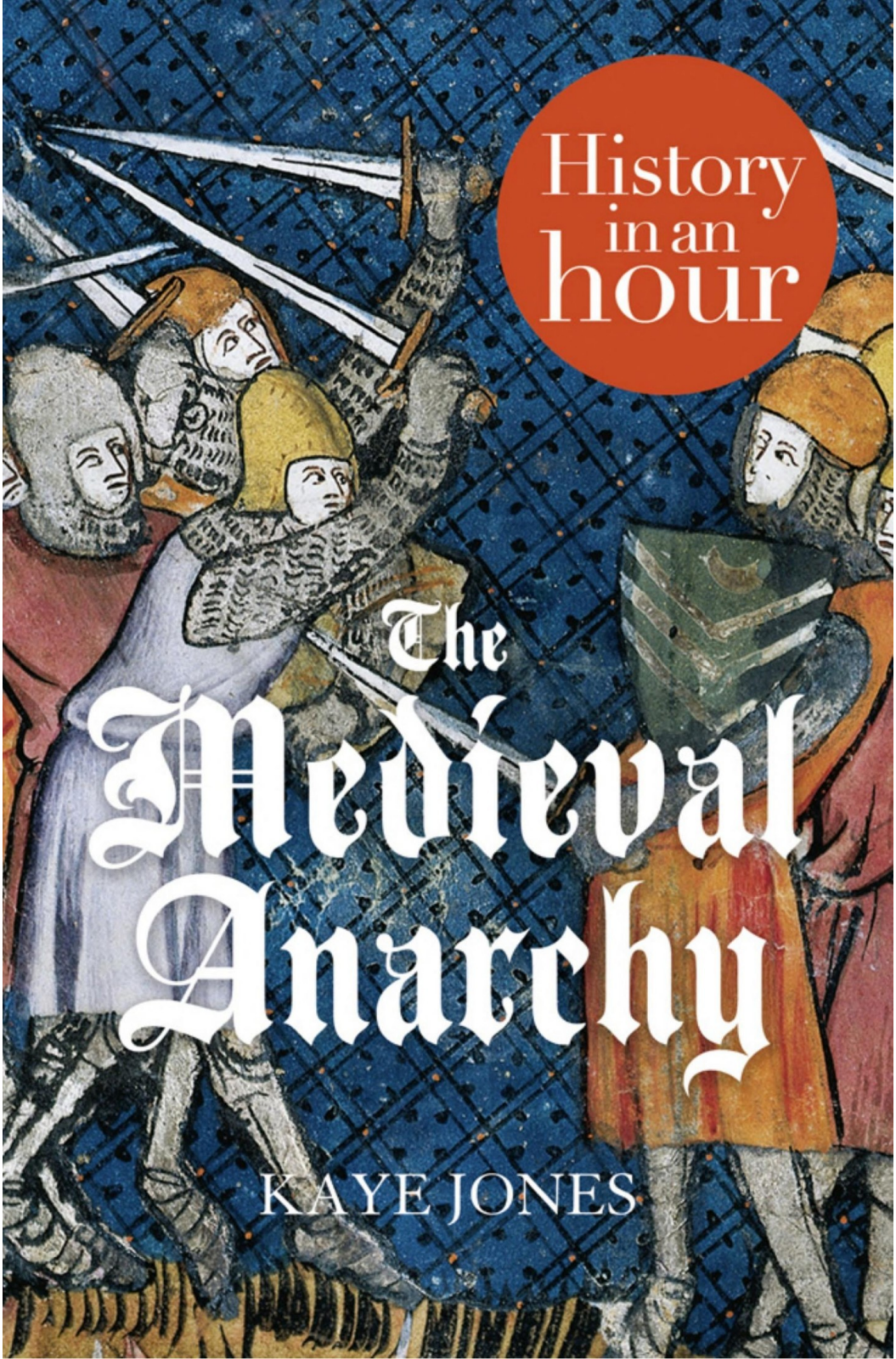
History in an hour
The Medieval Anarchy
KAYE JONES

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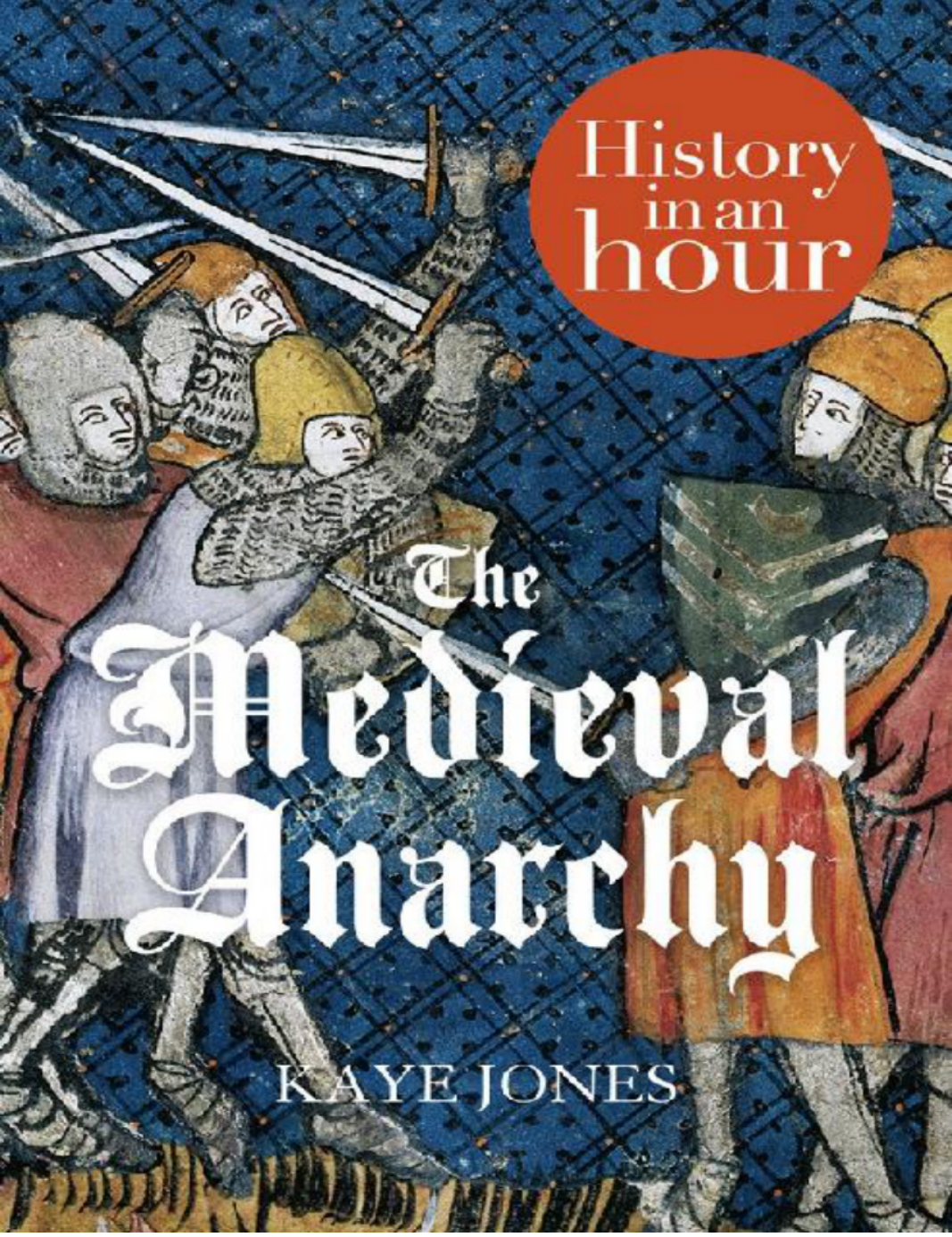
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THE MEDIEVAL ANARCHY

History in an Hour

Kaye Jones

About History in an Hour

History in an Hour is a series of ebooks to help the reader learn the basic facts of a given subject area. Everything you need to know is presented in a straightforward narrative and in chronological order. No embedded links to divert your attention, nor a daunting book of 600 pages with a 35-page introduction. Just straight in, to the point, sixty minutes, done. Then, having absorbed the basics, you may feel inspired to explore further.

Give yourself sixty minutes and see what you can learn …

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Introduction

The earth bare no corn, for the land was all laid waste by such deeds; and they said openly, that Christ slept, and his saints. Such things, and more than we can say, suffered we nineteen winters for our sins

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The death of King Henry I in 1135 created a succession crisis that resulted in England's first civil war. Nicknamed 'The Anarchy' for its unprecedented levels of chaos and disorder, this nineteen-year conflict witnessed the usurpation of King Stephen, and a persistent battle on the part of Henry's daughter, Matilda, to reclaim her royal inheritance. Though the civil war came to a peaceful end with the Treaty of Winchester in 1153, it was Matilda's son, Henry, who succeeded to the throne of England after the death of King Stephen in 1154.

This, in an hour, is the story of The Medieval Anarchy through the personalities, context, events, and aftermath of England's first, and often forgotten, civil war.

The *White Ship* Disaster

No ship ever brought so much misery to England

William of Malmesbury

As Duke of Normandy, King Henry I made frequent trips to his Duchy across the Channel. In November 1120, Henry was accompanied by his son and heir, William Adelin. On arrival in the French port of Barfleur, Thomas FitzStephen, master of the *White Ship*, approached the King and offered his services. FitzStephen claimed that his father had been employed by William the Conqueror as his personal captain; he had taken the Duke to England for the invasion of 1066. As Henry already had a good ship and crew of his own, he suggested that his son, William, and his party use the *White Ship* instead.

Having spent much of the day drinking, the 300-strong group – including FitzStephen, the helmsman and fifty oarsmen – were roaring drunk by the time they boarded the ship on the evening of 25 November 1120. Desperate to overtake the King's ship, which had already cleared the harbour, the helmsman began to steer the vessel northwards. It was during this manoeuvre that the *White Ship* hit a

rock on its port side and began to fill with water. In a bid to save the King's heir, Prince William and a small group of oarsmen descended into a dinghy and began to sail away from the ship. But the cries of those left behind soon became too much for William to bear and he ordered that the dinghy be turned around to help those in need. His attempts were in vain; the *White Ship* soon capsized, dragging William and his party deep into the murky waters.

White Ship *Disaster*

With only one known survivor, it is difficult to ascertain the full details of that fateful night. The lucky survivor was a butcher from Rouen, saved by the warm ram-skins that he was wearing and rescued by three fishermen the next day. The *White Ship* disaster claimed the lives of William Adelin and two of Henry's illegitimate children. Henry holds the record for the highest number of illegitimate children born to an English king. Historians estimate that he had approximately sixteen illegitimate daughters and nine illegitimate sons from a variety

of mistresses.

Although FitzStephen, the ship's captain, managed to swim to the surface, he allowed himself to drown rather than tell the King of William's death. This grim responsibility was left to an unidentified young boy. On hearing the news, Henry broke down and fell to the floor. Widowed and in his early fifties, it seemed unlikely that Henry would ever produce another male heir. His son's death had had truly set England on the road to disaster.

The Succession Crisis

In the aftermath of William's death, Henry's attention naturally turned to the issue of the succession. In a last ditch attempt to procure a legitimate male heir, a second marriage was suggested to Adeliza of Louvain. Young and attractive, it was hoped that she would quickly conceive a son. The marriage took place at Windsor Castle on 29 January 1121, with Adeliza's coronation carried out the following day.

Queen Adeliza

In the meantime Henry looked to his immediate family for a possible heir to his throne, should his plans for a son by Adeliza fail. Although he had other children, their illegitimacy ruled them out as potential candidates, though he had a particular fondness for the eldest, Robert, Earl of Gloucester. He had nephews too to consider. Stephen of Blois,

for instance. After all, Stephen had been living in his household for several years and had already demonstrated impressive military and political skills on a previous trip to Normandy.

But William Adelin was not Henry's only legitimate child. So far unconsidered, Matilda, now Empress of the Holy Roman Empire, was Henry's first-born and had the strongest claim among his family. Henry had not seen Matilda since 1110 when she had left England to marry Henry V, the Holy Roman Emperor. The marriage was childless and Matilda, widowed in 1125, was left with a rather uncertain future. Now, in 1126, Henry wondered if she might provide a solution to the succession problem. He called on his daughter to join him in Normandy, no doubt to get better acquainted, and, quite possibly, to discuss the realm's future.

Henry V and the Empress Matilda

Henry also took some time to discuss Matilda's suitability with his leading barons and advisers. In general they were uneasy about Matilda succeeding her father. After all, there was no precedent of female governance in England. In an era where the role of monarch encompassed politician and soldier, the unsuitability of women for

such a position was a sentiment echoed by many. King David of Scotland, the brother of Henry's late wife, and Robert, Earl of Gloucester, however, both spoke out in favour of Matilda and it was to these men that Henry listened. Thus, in January 1127, Henry named Matilda as his heir and invited the leading clergymen and barons of the realm to swear an oath of fealty to her, supporting her succession to the throne of England and the Duchy of Normandy.

In the meantime Henry arranged a second marriage for Matilda. The chosen groom was Geoffrey, a fourteen-year-old, who would become the Count of Anjou on his father's death in 1129. The pair were married on 17 June 1128, in the French town of Le Mans. Shortly after the wedding, Henry once again called on his barons to swear an oath of fealty to Matilda, suggesting that he may have doubted their faithfulness. As Matilda had just married into the House of Anjou, the historic enemy of the Normans, the barons disliked the idea that Geoffrey might rule them in one capacity or another after Henry's death. But, in 1131, Henry acted to make it clear that Matilda was his heir. For a third time, he called on his barons and clergy to swear an oath of fealty to his daughter.

The marriage between Matilda and Geoffrey turned sour soon after the wedding, but Henry was able to reconcile the couple and was soon rewarded with the arrival of grandsons. The first, Henry, was born on 5 March 1133, while the second, Geoffrey, appeared on 1 June 1134. In between the births, Henry had embarked on his final voyage across the Channel to Normandy. While on a hunting trip in November 1135, he fell ill after eating lampreys, his favourite food. An eel-like fish, lampreys were a popular delicacy in the Middle Ages, though Henry had been advised by his physician never to eat them. Surrounded by friends and family, including his illegitimate son, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, Henry made his last confession and received the last rites. If William of Malmesbury is to be believed, Henry also asked those present to accept Matilda as heir to England and Normandy. He then passed away on 1 December 1135.

Stephen the Usurper

Matilda was in Anjou at the time of her father's death. Father and daughter had recently argued over the ownership of several castles that were allegedly promised by Henry to the couple after their wedding. For reasons unknown, Matilda did not act to secure her inheritance when she heard of her father's passing. However, Stephen of Blois, Henry's nephew, took the initiative and despite warnings of a severe storm, set sail immediately from Blois to march on London. Popular among the citizens, they welcomed Stephen and he rewarded them with commune status, a privilege granting greater control over the city's affairs. In return, they swore an oath of fealty and elected him as their chosen king.

With the support of the people secured, Stephen headed to Winchester. Here, and possibly with the help of his brother, Henry, Bishop of Winchester, Stephen gained the support of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury, and William Pont de l'Arche, the royal treasurer. Stephen encountered some difficulty in persuading William Corbeil, Archbishop of Canterbury, to perform the coronation ceremony. Probably mindful of his oath to Matilda, it was only when Stephen made promises to uphold and protect the Church that he was convinced otherwise. After all, the country needed a ruler and Matilda was nowhere to be seen.

On 22 December 1135, Stephen of Blois was crowned in a ceremony at Winchester where he was anointed with holy oil and swore to uphold all the 'liberties and good laws' enacted by his predecessors. When news of the coronation reached Normandy, the local barons immediately accepted Stephen as their new duke.

King Stephen

As in Normandy, the majority of English barons were happy to have Stephen as their new ruler. He was popular, well-liked, and regarded as an efficient and capable man. A few men still remained who intended to honour their oath to Matilda, and so Stephen set about winning them over. One of the most resistant was Robert, Earl of Gloucester; he took until Easter to pay homage to the new king. Finally, just one leading figure remained who was not yet persuaded.

The Scottish Invasion

Back in 1127, it was King David of Scotland who had first sworn fealty to Matilda. We can never be sure if it was a simple case of putting family first (Matilda was David's niece), or whether he genuinely felt her to be a capable ruler. Either way, he did not take the news of Stephen of Blois' accession well; he refused to pay him homage and instead gathered his army and invaded the north of England. He captured the most strategically important towns of the border counties, including Carlisle, Alnwick, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Wherever he went, he took hostages and made men swear to uphold Matilda's claim to the throne. It was in the New Year that Stephen heard of David's campaign and by the time he had marched his army north, David was preparing to attack Durham.

King David I of Scotland

Fortunately the two kings began negotiating terms of peace before the attack on Durham got underway. Under the terms of this agreement, known as the First Treaty of Durham, made on 5 February 1136,

David retained Cumbria but surrendered Northumbria and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. David's son, Henry, was granted Doncaster, the lordship of Carlisle and the earldom of Huntingdon in return for paying homage to Stephen. Though David still refused to accept Stephen as king, the treaty marked a swift and successful end to hostilities.

Stephen's next challenge surfaced much closer to home when Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon, seized the royal castle at Exeter, prompting its citizens to request immediate help of Stephen. During his siege of the castle, in the summer of 1136, Baldwin secretly escaped to Carisbrooke. After three months, the Exeter garrison handed back the castle to Stephen, restoring peace and royal authority to the city. Having run out of water at Carisbrooke, however, Baldwin appealed to the king for mercy but was instead stripped of his lands and exiled. Baldwin fled to Anjou where he would later become one of Matilda's most active supporters.

While Matilda had made no direct attack on Stephen's kingship in England, she was now actively asserting her rights in Normandy. Possibly the news of Stephen's usurpation was enough to motivate such action. She began by occupying the castles of Exemes, Domfront, and Argentan, of which the latter served as a more permanent base and provided the setting for the birth of her third son, William, on 22 July 1136. In October she travelled to Le Sap where her husband, Geoffrey, was busy laying siege to the town's castle. Though his attack was unsuccessful, he was undeterred and continued his assault on Normandy for the next three years. Back in England, Stephen could hardly ignore the developing chaos in his Duchy and he crossed the Channel in March 1137. He hoped to reoccupy Argentan but instead agreed a truce with Geoffrey: the King would pay him 2,000 marks a year in return for peace along the Normandy–Anjou border. Geoffrey agreed and Stephen returned to England in December.

During Stephen's absence from England, however, King David had launched a second invasion in a bid to extend his territories. Shortly after Easter in 1137, he marched on Northumberland with his army and began pillaging the area. Fortunately Stephen's earls and barons were able to repel the Scots and force David to accept a six-month truce. But after six months, the truce had expired and Stephen was forced to return from Normandy to face King David who was once again knocking on England's door.

Battle of the Standard

[King David] hastened with his whole force to devastate Northumberland. And then that execrable army, more atrocious than the whole race of

pagans, neither fearing God nor regarding man, spread desolation over the whole province, and murdered everywhere persons of both sexes, of every age and rank, and devastated towns, churches and houses.

Richard of Hexham

Like his previous campaigns, David's third invasion of England in 1138 was not just an attempt to extend his sovereignty, it was also an opportunity to promote and assert Matilda's claim to the throne. However, the brutality of the Scottish army only served to harden attitudes against King David and strengthen the local population's loyalty to Stephen. David experienced an early success at the Battle of Clitheroe on 10 June 1138 where a section of his army, commanded by William Fitz Duncan, defeated the English in the northern county of Lancashire.

With the Scots now wreaking havoc across the north, the English had no choice but to attack. On 22 August 1138 the two armies met at Cowton Moor, near Northallerton, in Yorkshire. The ensuing conflict is known as the Battle of the Standard, a name that derives from the religious banners carried into battle by the English. In an assault that lasted less than a few hours, the Scots had either fled the battlefield or been destroyed by showers of English arrows and deadly hand-to-hand combat. When he heard news of the great victory, King Stephen was said to be overjoyed.

The battle may have been won but Stephen needed to prevent a repeat performance. In particular, he needed a settlement that would placate David's territorial ambitions. Under the terms of this peace agreement, known as the Second Treaty of Durham, Henry, David's son, was granted the earldom of Northumberland. A marriage to Ada, daughter of the Earl of Surrey, was also arranged and the pair wed the following year. While these generous concessions ended one war, there was another one brewing back in England.

The Rise of Matilda

A major turning point in King Stephen's reign was marked by the defection of Robert, Earl of Gloucester, to Matilda's side in May 1138. From this point on the country descended rapidly into anarchy, chaos, and civil war. Whether he was stirred by familial affection for his half-sister or suffered an attack of conscience after breaking his many oaths, we will never know. More important than the reasons, however, are the consequences of this act.

The conflict began with a series of major rebellions that broke out in southwest England, possibly inspired by Robert's defection. Stephen acted swiftly to crush the revolts and laid successful sieges at Hereford, Shrewsbury, Castle Cary, and Harptree but was unable to take Robert's stronghold of Bristol. The Welsh Marches, including Dudley and Ludlow, along with Dover, another of Robert's castles, also revolted against Stephen but were quickly brought back under royal control.

Though these rebellions were relatively small, they demonstrate the extent of Robert's influence. As the chronicle, *Gesta Stephani,* states:

> [the rebels] were bound to the earl [Robert] by ties of friendship, firmly united with him by pledge and oath, and so much his allies by compact and homage that as soon as they learned he wished to rebel against the king's power, they joined in his rebellion promptly and by agreement.

The defection of one man had brought Matilda the strength and might of the southwest of England.

Second Lateran Council

In early 1139, Matilda launched her first direct attack on Stephen by writing to the Papal court in Rome. As the highest authority in Medieval Europe, Matilda knew that securing this support for her claim was crucial to becoming queen of England. The Papal court agreed to hear the case and discussions opened on 4 April 1139 at a meeting known as the Second Lateran Council. Neither Matilda nor Stephen attended in person but each sent representatives to appear on their behalf.

Pope Innocent II, convened the Second Lateran Council

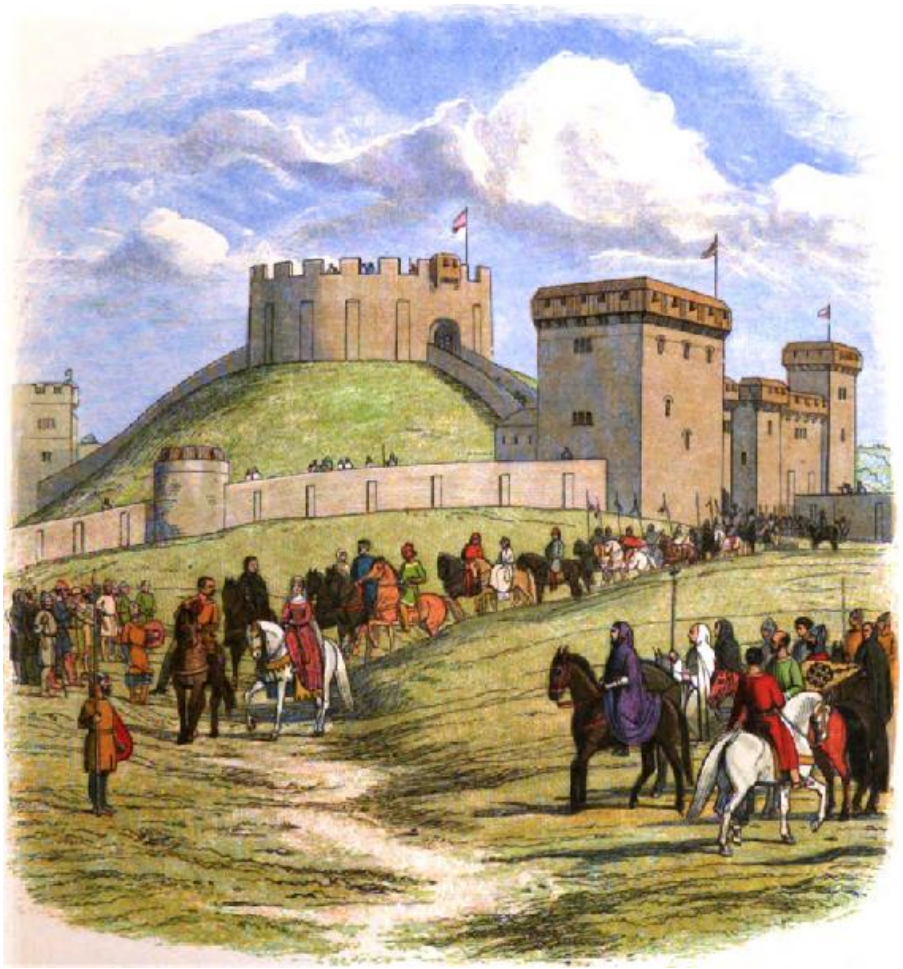
The Pope, with whom all decisions lay, neither adjourned nor passed judgement on the case. This created a situation whereby Stephen continued to rule and Matilda was left anxious and frustrated. In fact the Pope never made a formal decision on the English succession. Perhaps he hoped that Stephen and Matilda might come to some agreement on their own. The Pope's indecision only strengthened Matilda's resolve to reclaim her inheritance by force, and with the support of Robert, the decision was made to take the fight directly to

Stephen in England.

Civil War Begins

On 30 September 1139 Matilda, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and a handful of supporters landed at Sussex on the English coast. Robert headed directly for Bristol, his only remaining stronghold, while Matilda took refuge under the protection of her stepmother, Adeliza, at Arundel Castle. While some may have expected a more dramatic arrival, it is important to remember that these were early days; Matilda and Robert had neither the supporters nor soldiers to storm London and have Stephen physically removed. Stephen was aware that Matilda had entered his kingdom, having already positioned a guard on the coast to keep watch. The rebellious Baldwin of Redvers had also arrived in England, landing further west along the coast at Wareham, Dorset, before heading to Corfe Castle. Stephen could only be in one place at a time and so, feeling Matilda to be the bigger threat, he moved on Arundel.

Adeliza was in an awkward situation. Widowed after the death of Henry I, she had married William d'Aubigny, Earl of Arundel, one of Stephen's most loyal supporters, and had also done homage to the new king. When Stephen arrived to lay siege to the castle, Adeliza had little choice but to withdraw her support from Matilda. Arundel was a difficult castle to conquer and, in a strange turn of events, Stephen granted Matilda safe passage to her stepbrother at Bristol. Probably for his own peace of mind, he arranged for his brother, Henry, Bishop of Winchester, and Waleran, Count of Meulan, to personally escort her.



Matilda leaves Arundel Castle, 1864 engraving

Matilda arrived safely at Bristol and counted two new men among her supporters. The first was Miles, the castellan (castle governor) of Gloucester. According to the *Gesta Stephani*, Miles was 'so unquestioning in his loyalty to King Henry's children as not only to have helped them, but likewise to have received the countess of Anjou [Matilda] herself with her men and always behaved to her like a father in deed and counsel.' The other supporter was Brian FitzCount, Lord of Wallingford, who had escorted Matilda to Anjou in 1127 for her marriage to Geoffrey.

Stephen could not ignore the growing support for Matilda and decided to tackle the rebellion head on, targeting FitzCount's castle at Wallingford. Situated in the modern county of Oxfordshire, it was the most easterly of Matilda's bases. If Stephen could take the castle he could also contain the geographical spread of the rebellion and cut off

Matilda's access to London. But its strong, thick walls and formidable garrison troops ensured that Wallingford was no easy target. Furthermore, its ample supplies meant that Wallingford could not be quickly starved into submission – a favourite tactic of the King. With a long fight ahead, Stephen decided to leave a besieging force at Wallingford while he headed west into enemy territory in pursuit of easier gains.

Miles of Gloucester was the next of Matilda's supporters to feel the King's wrath, as Stephen marched on Wiltshire to take the family's castle at Trowbridge. En route, Stephen had also captured castles at South Cerney and Malmesbury. While Stephen prepared to lay siege to Trowbridge, Miles had launched a successful, surprise attack on the force left behind at Wallingford. Robert of Gloucester also joined the action, fiercely attacking the royal city of Worcester on 7 November 1139. The chronicler, John of Worcester, described the scene:

> A vast mob of the enemy, infuriated and unrestrained, poured in and set alight to buildings in different parts of the city … many were taken prisoner in the streets who leashed together like so many dogs were dragged away miserably.

In response, Stephen laid waste to the countryside around Hereford, Bristol, and Dunster – an act that only served to harden civilian attitudes against him in the southwest. Peace talks between the Royalists, those loyal to Stephen, and the Angevins – Matilda's followers – had come to nothing and there was now little hope of curbing the spread of violence beyond the southwest. This pattern of besieging, pillaging, and raiding established in these early years, would now become the conflict's defining characteristic.

The Battle of Lincoln

Towards the end of 1140, King Stephen had intervened in a dispute over the royal castle at Lincoln. Although Stephen had appointed William d'Aubigny, Earl of Lincoln, the castle had been seized by half-brothers, Ranulf of Chester and William of Roumare. Instead of persecuting the brothers for their actions, Stephen created de Roumare as the new earl of Lincoln, transferring d'Aubigny to Sussex. Shortly before Christmas, however, Stephen received a plea from the citizens of Lincoln, claiming mistreatment at the hands of their new earl and appealing for help. Stephen's response was to gather a small force and march north.

On entering the city, Stephen found that Ranulf of Chester had fled and that only a small garrison remained. Earl William (of Roumare) was inside but refused to hand over the castle and so Stephen began his attack, expecting that those inside would not hold out too long. What Stephen did not realise, however, was that Ranulf had gone directly to his father-in-law, Robert of Gloucester, where he pledged fealty to Matilda in return for military support at Lincoln. For Robert, this was not just about protecting his daughter – still resident at Lincoln castle – it was also an opportunity to extend Matilda's Angevin influence and territory beyond the southwest of England. Without a moment's hesitation, Robert made ready for war.

When it came to raising an army, Robert looked to his allies in the southwest and the Welsh Marches. Several Welsh rulers also lent their support to the Angevin campaign. This was less through loyalty to Matilda, however, and more likely an attempt to profit from the chaotic situation in England. Since Stephen's accession in 1135, there had been several skirmishes on the Anglo–Welsh border with a pitched battle in 1136. Though the details are sketchy, it appears to have been a Welsh victory.

Having arrived in Lincoln with only a besieging force, Stephen was

considerably outnumbered and refused to heed the advice to avoid battle and seek reinforcements. Robert had gathered a significant number of men thanks to his supporters in the southwest and Welsh Marches. The two sides met on 2 February 1141 outside the city's western wall. Contemporary accounts of the battle suggest that the royal army consisted of a central division containing King Stephen, who led his forces on foot, and a group of dismounted knights, flanked on both sides by a small group of cavalry. The Angevins adopted a very similar position, with Robert of Gloucester leading from the centre. Both flanks contained a number of Welsh infantry, though probably stood further forward than the other soldiers. The army also contained a large number of archers, most likely brought by Ranulf of Chester.

Battle of Lincoln in Henry of Huntingdon's Chronicle

The Welsh infantry were the first victims of the battle. Attacked by both flanks of the Royalist cavalry, the ill-armed and ill-disciplined infantry were either cut down or fled from the field. In the next wave, the Angevins advanced, possibly aided by an arrow attack, and broke through the royal line. According to the chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, this Angevin offensive forced several of Stephen's key nobles to flee, including his commander, William of Ypres. Those who remained were now completely surrounded by the Angevins who 'attacked it on every side, as if storming a castle.' In the chaos, the

King replaced his broken sword with a battle axe and made a ‘strong and most resolute resistance.’ But the axe soon broke, leaving Stephen defenceless. An unnamed Angevin soldier then hit him over the head with a rock and he was taken prisoner. With Stephen captured and the army routed, the Angevins rejoiced at their decisive victory. Matilda now had a real opportunity to take the throne.

Lady of the English

The greater part of the kingdom at once submitted to the countess [Matilda] and her adherents.

Gesta Stephani

With Stephen now imprisoned in Robert of Gloucester's castle at Bristol, the majority of his supporters, believing the Royalist cause to be lost, submitted at once to the Empress Matilda. Some, like Waleran of Meulan, took a little longer but defected nonetheless. There followed a similar situation in Normandy where Royalist magnates made peace with Matilda's husband, Geoffrey. But it was not just the nobility that Matilda needed to win over. If she wanted official recognition and a coronation, she would need to convince the Church to back her and renounce Stephen.

On 2 March 1141 Matilda and Robert met with Stephen's brother, Henry, Bishop of Winchester. Henry asked her to promise 'that all matters of chief account in England, especially gifts of bishoprics and abbacies, should be subject to his [Henry's] control.' In return he would receive her 'in Holy Church as lady of England' and would keep

his faith to her unbroken. Matilda agreed and on the following day entered the city of Winchester to a triumphant reception. The citizens proclaimed her the queen of England and she took up residence in the castle, receiving the royal crown and the keys to the treasury.

Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, with his Staff and Ring

There were some members of the clergy, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, who refused to break their oaths of fealty to Stephen. But a series of secret meetings, arranged by the Bishop of Winchester, managed to convince them otherwise. As Henry pointed out to his colleagues 'that while I should love my mortal brother [King Stephen], I should esteem far more highly the cause of my immortal Father.' As long as Matilda kept her side of the bargain, the Church was firmly on her side.

While Matilda prepared for her coronation in London, the few remaining Royalists busied themselves with resurrecting their cause. At the helm was Stephen's wife, Queen Matilda, Henry's niece, who fought not only on her husband's behalf but also for her son, Eustace, claimant to his father's throne. Since Stephen's capture, Queen Matilda acted as regent of the kingdom and tirelessly petitioned the Angevins and the Church for her husband's release. With the help of her right-hand man, William of Ypres, she desperately sought to win back those magnates who now threw their weight behind the Empress

and her cause. As the *Gesta Stephani* noted:

> Having now obtained the submission of the greatest part of the kingdom … she came with vast military display to London, at the humble request of the citizens.

With the support of the Church, and the citizens of Winchester and London in place, Matilda had only one remaining hurdle – her coronation as queen of England. While the final preparations got underway, Matilda settled down to the business of ruling. She sent for the richest men in London and demanded the substantial sum of £500. The men claimed that the war in England had emptied their pockets and so they pleaded that payment be delayed until prosperity had returned to the city. According to the *Gesta Stephani*, Matilda 'with a grim look, her forehead wrinkled into a frown, every trace of a woman's gentleness removed from her face, blazed into intemperate fury.'

She demanded full payment immediately, even threatening to remove the commune status that Stephen had granted in 1135. And so 'the citizens went away gloomily to their homes'. The Londoners had never been treated so harshly by a monarch; it was one thing to remove their commune status, but quite another to demand such high sums of money. All this, too, from a woman; expected to be maternal and subservient.

Empress Matilda, Lady of the English

The next to face Matilda was Bishop Henry, acting on behalf of his nephew Eustace. Henry asked that Eustace be given control of his family's lands in Boulogne. This may appear an innocent request but Matilda immediately recognised its potential problems; if she allowed Eustace to inherit Boulogne, he could build up a power base from which to launch an attack on England and seize the throne. She flatly denied the request, preferring to keep Eustace landless and under her supervision in England.

Historians have often looked to Matilda's past to explain her behaviour in London. She had spent the majority of her life as empress of the Holy Roman Empire where the ideas of absolute monarchy reigned supreme. When confronted with similar situations in the past, she had fought fire with fire, harshly reprimanding any who dared to stand in her way. In many ways, her actions in London, they argue, were a reflection of such an upbringing. But these actions would not be tolerated by the English, who had come to expect a different style of rule from their monarch; a person expected to be just, merciful, and to act in the best interests of their people. This behaviour served only to alienate her supporters, pushing them into Stephen's arms.

Matilda of Boulogne, Queen Consort of King Stephen I

The discontent in London provided the perfect backdrop for the Royalists' next move. Led by Queen Matilda and William of Ypres, they marched on London, having raised a significant army. The Royalists were warmly welcomed by Londoners and together they stormed the city gates and made for the royal palace. Matilda and the Angevins fled the city on horseback and rode to sanctuary at Oxford Castle. Matilda may have had a lucky escape but now Bishop Henry and the citizens of London had switched allegiance back to Stephen. Without their support, she had lost any hope of a coronation.

Rout of Winchester

After the rebellion in London, Bishop Henry returned to Winchester. Having defected, he now intended to rid his city of its remaining Angevin influence and immediately set about besieging the royal castle, held in Matilda's name. The Angevins trapped inside now appealed to Matilda still at Oxford Castle. She arrived with her army on 31 July 1141, on a mission to relieve the castle. In the meantime, Bishop Henry had fortified his palace, Wolvesey, and escaped to Queen Matilda and the Royalists in London.

With Bishop Henry gone, Matilda and the Angevins entered the city of Winchester. They quickly relieved the royal castle and set to work on besieging Wolvesey. They could not have anticipated what happened next. The Royalist army, led by Queen Matilda and William of Ypres, surrounded the city walls thereby creating a double siege and cutting off vital lines of supply. The Angevins were now trapped and at the mercy of their enemies.

The situation was exacerbated when fire broke out in the city on 2 August, destroying homes, churches, two abbeys, and much of the royal castle. With limited shelter and supplies, the Angevins persevered until September when the decision was made to leave the city. On 14 September Robert launched a diversionary attack, allowing Matilda to safely flee Winchester with her escorts, Brian FitzCount and Reginald of Cornwall. King David of Scotland and his son, Henry – present at the siege – were next to follow. Miles of Gloucester escaped the city 'half naked' after shedding his armour to prevent identification. At the rear, however, Robert and the remainder of the Angevin army were pursued by the Royalists. Separated from their allies, they had no choice but to turn around and fight.

Matilda was now en route to the safety of Gloucester castle. A sense of urgency dictated that she abandon the traditional female pose of riding side-saddle and she soon entered the county of Wiltshire. She

made two overnight stops here, first at Ludgershall and then at Devizes. According to myth, Matilda hid in a coffin to complete the final leg of her journey to Gloucester, but she was in fact so exhausted that she had to be carried on a litter by two horses. It did not take long for the latest news from Winchester to spread and reach the Angevin camp. The Rout of Winchester had been a complete failure and the Royalists had captured Robert of Gloucester.

News of Robert's capture was a tremendous blow to Matilda and her followers. Robert was a central figure in the Angevin camp and negotiations for his release commenced immediately. Matilda had a bargaining tool in Stephen, still incarcerated at Bristol, but the discussions were lengthy and complex. An agreement was finally reached and an exchange of prisoners arranged. On 1 November 1141 Stephen was released from Bristol, with Robert following two days later. The Angevins were also allowed possession of the castles at Oxford and Devizes. Giving Stephen his freedom came at a price to Matilda – he was now free to resume his reign in England.

King Stephen Fights Back

In December 1141 a church council confirmed Stephen as the king of England and excommunicated all those in support of Matilda. Stephen now set about clawing back support and generating some much-needed cash to resume the war of succession. After all, there had been no peace treaty after the Rout of Winchester and Matilda's continued presence remained a significant threat to the kingdom's security, especially in the southwest.

The Angevins reached out for military support, appealing directly to Geoffrey of Anjou in June 1142. But Geoffrey refused to send help and instead demanded to see Robert in person. The Angevins had little choice but to comply with his request and send Robert to Normandy – a move that left Matilda and her party vulnerable to attack.

In September, Stephen launched a major offensive against the Angevins. He headed deep into enemy territory and moved first on Wareham, a Dorset port used by Matilda to communicate with her allies in Normandy. Stephen plundered and set fire to the town before capturing the castle, held by Robert's son, William. Stephen and his army marched next on Oxford. It was defended by a deep river, intended to deter intruders, but the water was no match for the determined King who dived into the water and led the swim across.

Siege of Oxford

On 29 September 1142 the Royalists tore through Oxford and blockaded the castle. Stephen's aim was to starve out and capture Matilda, thereby bringing the civil war to an end. His men guarded the castle day and night to prevent the entry of much-needed supplies and, more importantly, to ensure that Matilda could not get away. Any hopes of a rescue attempt were slim; Robert had returned from

Normandy, along with Matilda's eldest son, Henry of Anjou, and an army of 300 men, but he concentrated his efforts on recovering the castle at Wareham. From his base at Wallingford, Brian FitzCount set about organising a mission to Oxford but lacked the manpower to repel Stephen's army. Thus, as winter set in and supplies ran dangerously low, Matilda's situation appeared ever bleaker.

Matilda escapes from Oxford, 1868 engraving

In early December, Matilda and a small escort made a daring escape. Dressed in white to act as camouflage in the snow, they sneaked past Stephen's guards and exited the castle through the postern gate. They then crossed the frozen River Thames on foot, making first for Abingdon and then, on horseback, to Wallingford. Now under the protection of Brian FitzCount, Matilda travelled to the safety of

Devizes, an impressive stone fortress that would remain her home for the next six years. Back in Oxford, the garrison soon surrendered and the castle returned to royal control. It was not the outcome that Stephen had anticipated, but it was a victory nonetheless.

Battle of Wilton

From Oxford, Stephen and his army marched on Wareham where Robert and Henry had recaptured and fortified the castle. Stephen laid siege but was unsuccessful and instead headed to Wiltshire, determined to make headway in Angevin territory. Stationed at Wilton Abbey, Stephen awaited reinforcements while he prepared to take the nearby city of Salisbury. Before he could launch the attack, however, the Angevins made a surprise appearance and laid siege to the abbey.

We have few details of the ensuing battle at Wilton on 1 July 1143 but we know that the Angevin cavalry charged forward, forcing the Royalists to pull back. In a scene reminiscent of the Battle of Lincoln, Stephen was routed and narrowly escaped capture. The Angevins instead took his steward, William Martel, who had used a diversionary tactic to enable Stephen's escape. After the battle, Stephen was forced to relinquish control of Sherborne Castle to secure Martel's release.

Rebellion of Geoffrey de Mandeville

Though Stephen had been defeated at Wilton, two events occurred over the next twelve months that demonstrated a steady change in his fortunes. The first of these began in September 1143 when Stephen ordered the arrest of Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex. While there was no obvious reason for the Earl's arrest, Stephen refused to let him go until he had handed over his extensive castles and lands in the southeast. Geoffrey grudgingly complied with the King's request and was released soon after. This left Geoffrey determined to exact revenge on Stephen for his territorial losses.

With an army of followers, Geoffrey 'raged everywhere with fire and sword', pillaging towns and villages across the southeast. He seized Ramsey Abbey, evicted the monks and turned it into his personal fortress. Cambridgeshire became a particular focal point for Geoffrey's anger and Stephen acted quickly to quell the Earl's destruction by building a new royal castle at Burwell. It was only half built when Geoffrey came to destroy it. As he surveyed the castle ahead of the attack, however, he was hit in the eye by a royal archer and died one week later on 26 September 1144.

While the Mandeville rebellion had brought chaos to much of the southeast, it had been a decisive victory for Stephen. He had gained control of several key castles in and around the capital, including the Tower of London, and demonstrated his strength in times of crisis. Though Stephen's preoccupation with Geoffrey enabled the Angevins to attack Malmesbury and Oxford, the death of Miles of Gloucester during a hunting accident on Christmas Eve 1143 was a great blow. This second event only served to boost Royalist morale.

Buoyed by his recent success, Stephen launched a campaign into Gloucestershire, the heart of Angevin territory. Stephen first targeted Tetbury but was quickly forced to abandon the siege when Robert and his army came to its aid. Stephen fled, unwilling to fight a pitched

battle with only a besieging force behind him. His defeat at Lincoln and Wilton had clearly taught him this important lesson. He moved on and successfully captured Winchcomb, before heading east and pillaging the lands of the Angevin supporter, Hugh Bigod.

Faringdon

Robert of Gloucester's son Philip requested, in 1145, that his father build a new castle at Faringdon. Close to Oxford and Wallingford, it would provide an ideal opportunity to consolidate Angevin gains in the area and, more importantly, to focus on eastward expansion. Robert selected a large mound, known as Folly Hill, on which to site the new castle and gave the go-ahead for a timber and stone construction. Robert then installed a permanent garrison, drawn from the 'flower of his troops' to keep watch over it.

In the meantime Stephen appealed to his London allies and marched on Faringdon to take the newly built castle. The chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, described the scene:

> There was no delay in erecting war engines of wonderful powers against the castle, and these with archers skilfully posted round the walls, severely annoyed the troops within. The engines crushed them with stones, or whatever else they projected, falling on their heads; the bowmen showered flights of arrows so thick in their faces as greatly to distress them. The Royalists harassed the besieged by daily attacks of this kind.

Under such intense attack, it took only four days for the garrison commander to contact Stephen and strike a secret deal with him. Under the terms of the deal, Faringdon would peacefully surrender and Stephen would receive a large stash of arms and booty as well as a number of hostages to ransom. This was a decisive victory that not only halted Angevin expansion but also reconciled Stephen with Philip of Gloucester who now abandoned Matilda and defected to the royal side.

Robert faced another family defection in the following year. This

time it was his son-in-law, Ranulf of Chester, who had requested his aid at Lincoln back in 1141. Ranulf made his peace with Stephen at Stamford in 1146 and together they recaptured Bedford Castle and laid an unsuccessful siege on Wallingford. Ranulf then appealed for the King's help in an expedition against the Welsh, but was quickly rebuffed. Stephen's most loyal barons appear to have warned Stephen of Ranulf's potential treachery. Ranulf now found himself in a similar situation to Geoffrey de Mandeville; he was arrested and forced to surrender his castles. The most important of these, Lincoln, was now in Stephen's possession and the dispossessed Earl returned to the Angevin camp.

By 1147 Matilda and her followers were now in a desperate situation and appealed, once again, to Geoffrey for aid. Tied up with affairs in Normandy, Geoffrey could offer little in the way of practical support and instead sent across the Channel his eleven-year-old son, Henry of Anjou. Rumours circulated that Henry commanded an army of thousands but in reality he had only a handful of mercenaries, recruited on the promise of booty in England. On arrival, Henry marched to Wiltshire and attacked Philip of Gloucester at Cricklade but was easily rebuffed. Now penniless, neither his uncle Robert nor his mother provided any financial assistance, forcing Henry to ask Stephen for the money to pay off his mercenaries and to return home to Normandy. Stephen duly obliged and the young soldier left England after a rather disappointing first campaign.

Robert of Gloucester's effigy

In the same year the Angevin cause was hit by its greatest hardship yet; Earl Robert fell ill with a fever and died at Bristol on 31 October 1147. His death marks a major turning point in the course of the civil

war as Matilda had lost her brilliant military commander and Stephen his greatest adversary. Matilda's loss was intensely personal too; Robert was her brother, protector and confidante, he had stood by her since the first oath in 1127. Combined with the death of Miles of Gloucester in 1143, Matilda's cause appeared entirely lost, and in March 1148 she left England, never to return.

The Next Generation

Matilda's departure did not signal the end of the civil war. It was now left to her son and heir, Henry, to continue the struggle for the Angevin succession. Though still in his youth, Henry made a third visit to England in 1149 where he was knighted by his uncle, King David of Scotland, at Carlisle on 22 May. Ranulf of Chester, newly returned to the Angevin party, joined David and Henry in the north and was eager to launch an expedition against Stephen. The trio planned an attack on the city of York, but were repelled by Stephen and his army and forced to disband. Henry left Yorkshire and made straight for the southwest. This was no easy journey. At every turn he encountered traps and ambushes, laid not by Stephen but by Eustace – the rising star in the Royalist camp.

As Matilda had done with Henry, so Stephen had spent the late-1140s paving the way for the succession of his son and heir, Eustace. He was four years older than his Angevin rival, Henry, had been knighted and then invested as the count of Boulogne, in 1146–7. The chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, described Eustace as 'a man of high character', who 'excelled in warlike exercises, had great natural courage and stood high in military fame.' He now pursued Henry across the southwest, raiding towns in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, while his father remained in the north. Equipped with lands, money, and a private army, Eustace posed a serious threat to Henry's safety and to the future of the Angevin succession. For the third time in the civil war, the Angevins appealed to Geoffrey of Anjou for help only to be rebuffed. Having achieved little, Henry returned home to Normandy.

Henry of Anjou

Though the struggle for supremacy in England went on for years, Normandy had been brought under Angevin control in 1144 when Geoffrey of Anjou assumed the title of duke. Now a peaceful and prosperous place, Geoffrey and Matilda handed over control of Normandy to Henry on his return from England. In the summer of 1151 Henry paid homage for Normandy to the French King, Louis VII; a move that thwarted Stephen and Eustace's plan to recapture the Duchy. For the first time since war broke out, Geoffrey was free to concentrate his efforts on taking the English throne. Any hopes of organising an invasion were quickly dashed with Geoffrey's sudden death on 7 September 1151. As the new count of Anjou and Maine, Henry now had the responsibility of two new territories, leaving little time to concentrate on his English campaign.

Eleanor of Aquitaine

Since becoming a knight in 1149, Henry's political strength and prestige had grown significantly. As the result of his father's death, he was not only the duke of Normandy but also the count of Anjou, Maine, and Touraine. But the following year, 1152, bought great changes to his personal life too, through his union to one of the best-known women of the Middle Ages, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Henry met Eleanor during the proceedings of her divorce from King Louis of France. Described by contemporaries as a woman 'without compare', Eleanor was not only beautiful and charming but she was also the Countess of Aquitaine – a vast territory in the southwest of France. Their marriage in May 1152 added Aquitaine to his already long list of territories and transformed him into one of the greatest landholders of the era.

Eleanor of Aquitaine

While Henry continued with his plans to invade England, King Louis formed an alliance against him with several French magnates and Stephen's son, Eustace. Louis, no doubt feeling bitter about his ex-wife's new marriage and threatened by Henry's rising power, incited rebellion in Normandy and Anjou, forcing Henry to abandon the English expedition. But Louis had underestimated his rival's military prowess and by September, Henry had crushed any opposition in his territories. His focus now returned to England.

The Expedition of 1153

Henry of Anjou finally arrived in England on 6 January 1153 at the head of a medium-sized force of 140 knights and 3,000 infantrymen, many of whom were mercenaries. He headed straight for Malmesbury, collecting supporters as he marched. They attacked the castle but experienced fierce resistance from its royal castellan, Jordan. The citizens of Malmesbury, also loyal to Stephen, defended the town with all their might and even lined up around its walls. Using archers to fire at the citizens and ladders to climb over the walls, Henry's men took the town by storm and besieged the castle for a second time. The castellan was able to escape and went directly to Stephen for help. With his son beside him, Stephen wasted no time in mobilising his army, setting up camp just outside the town. The day after, the opposing armies met over the River Avon as chronicler, Henry of Huntingdon, wrote:

> But God was not with them [the Royalists], in whom only there is entire safety. For the floodgates of heaven were opened, and heavy rain drove in their faces, with violent gusts of wind and severe cold so that God himself appeared to march for the duke.

The weather certainly made combat a near impossible task but there were other reasons why battle was avoided that day. For Henry, it was a simple case of being outnumbered; even with the wind and rain battering his enemy, there was no guarantee that his small, invading force could be victorious. For Stephen, the problem lay with his war-weary barons who were anxious to end the years of civil war. A truce followed and Jordan surrendered Malmesbury castle to Henry, while Stephen and Eustace returned to London.

Wallingford

Despite the attitude of his barons, Stephen stepped up his efforts to drive Henry out of England for good. Wallingford – the Angevin stronghold that he had failed to capture in 1139 – became the focus of his efforts. Stephen had already laid the groundwork for taking Wallingford, having blockaded the castle and built two counter-castles there in 1152. Now, with a tired and starving garrison, he probably hoped for a quick surrender. Unfortunately for Stephen, after triumphantly marching through the Midlands, Henry made straight for Wallingford in a bid to relieve his garrison and repel the royal forces.

Henry first attacked Crowmarsh, one of Stephen's counter-castles. His men easily broke through the bailey (outer wall) and then proceeded to attack the motte (raised earthwork) directly. During the onslaught they were set upon by a group of royal knights who had hidden in the surrounding area, but the Angevins fought them off and quickly captured the Crowmarsh garrison. Henry then encircled the castle with his men and prepared to lay siege. Expecting that Stephen would try and retake Crowmarsh, he constructed defensive wooden ramparts that would enable a quick escape to Wallingford, should the need arise. As Henry anticipated, Stephen rallied his army and marched on Wallingford.

Like Malmesbury, the opposing armies prepared for battle but no fight ensued. Once again Henry was outnumbered and both parties were dissuaded from action by battle-weary barons. Calls for peace were becoming ever-stronger as Henry of Huntingdon recorded:

> Then the traitorous nobles interfered, and proposed among themselves terms of peace. They loved, indeed, nothing better than disunion; but they had no inclination for war.

Private discussions between Henry and Stephen followed but no long-term agreement was reached. This was possibly due to Eustace who, according to the *Gesta Stephani,* was 'greatly vexed and angry because the war, in his opinion, had reached no proper conclusion'. No fighting took place that day at Wallingford, but the counter-castle (Crowmarsh) built to aid in the destruction of Wallingford was pulled down. Minor skirmishes continued throughout the next few months as Henry attacked Oxford, Stamford and Nottingham, but Eustace's sudden death on 17 August distracted Stephen from the war. Stephen and Henry would not meet again until November, this time at

Winchester where they agreed a lasting peace that would finally address the contested succession and bring to an end the civil war in England.

The Treaty of Winchester

So it was provided and firmly established that, arms having been completely laid down, peace should be restored everywhere in the kingdom.

Gesta Stephani

The peace treaty, ratified on 6 November 1153, probably originated from private discussions at Wallingford. Under its terms, Stephen would be allowed to rule as King of England for the rest of his natural life and on his death the succession would pass to Henry of Anjou, Matilda's son, and Stephen's newly adopted heir. There were other important clauses too; castles built during the civil war, for example, would be demolished and any foreign mercenaries sent home. For the first time since the death of Henry I, England's future looked stable.

King Henry II of England

When Henry returned to Normandy in March 1154, he may well have harboured concerns about Stephen's commitment to the treaty. After all, adopting Henry as his heir meant disinheriting his children; an act that few fathers would carry out. There was little that Henry could do but sit back and wait. In the meantime Stephen's royal authority was restored and he enjoyed complete control of his kingdom, even in the southwest. However, on 25 October Stephen was 'seized violently with a pain in the gut' at Dover Priory and died. Henry left Normandy on 7 November and was crowned King Henry II in a ceremony at

Westminster on 19 December 1154.

The Legacy of the Anarchy

There was nothing but disturbance and wickedness and robbery

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Historians have questioned whether the civil war was truly a time of ‘anarchy’ in England. Contemporary chroniclers paint a picture of widespread lawlessness and disorder, characterized by pillaging, raiding, and castle warfare. It is true that some areas, such as Wiltshire and the Thames Valley, experienced unprecedented levels of violence during the troubled reign of King Stephen while others, like the southeast, were virtually untouched. Either way, such violence had a very real and enduring impact on the local communities in which it took place. Whether or not it was ‘anarchic’, it was certainly a time of weak kingship. Embroiled in the fight for his throne, Stephen was distracted from the business of ruling and lost control over much of the northern and southwestern parts of his realm, not to mention the Duchy of Normandy.

Henry’s accession in 1154 ushered in a new era for England, characterized by law, order, and prosperity. Moreover, with the Duke

of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Maine, Anjou, and Touraine, as its king, England now stood at the heart of the vast Angevin Empire – an area that would eventually stretch from Ireland to the Pyrenees in the east. His marriage to Eleanor would also produce some of the most memorable figures of the Middle Ages, including Richard the Lionheart and the infamous King John. In the middle of it all stands Matilda. She tirelessly campaigned for herself and her successor. She may not have ruled as England's queen but without her, Henry may have been a very different monarch, if he had ever ruled at all.

Appendix 1: Key Players

Henry I c. 1068/9–1135

King Henry I of England was born at Selby, the youngest son of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. He ascended to the throne only three days after the death of his brother, King William II, while his other brother, Robert, was on crusade. As a result Robert invaded England in 1101 and Henry was forced to cede to him his Lordship of Normandy. The pair met again in 1106 – this time on the battlefield at Tinchebrai. Henry was the victor and quickly re-conquered Normandy. Robert, however, spent the next twenty-eight years as Henry's prisoner.

In 1100 Henry married the Scottish princess, Edith, creating an alliance that would bring peace to the Anglo–Scottish border. The pair had two children: Matilda, born 1102, and William, born 1103, but Henry also fathered around twenty-five illegitimate children, a record among British kings. After the *White Ship* disaster and death of his heir, William, in 1120, Henry became increasingly preoccupied with the succession. Now a widow, he remarried and recalled his daughter, Matilda, from Germany, in a bid to secure the futures of England and Normandy. He urged his barons to support Matilda's succession and had them swear three separate oaths of fealty to her. He died on 1 December 1135 after eating lampreys and is buried at Reading Abbey.

Empress Matilda 1102–1167

The only legitimate daughter of King Henry I and Edith of Scotland, Matilda was born on 7 February 1102 at Sutton Courtenay. She was betrothed to Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor, at her father's Whitsun Court on 13 June 1109 and left England in the following year. The

marriage took place in February 1114, less than one month before her twelfth birthday, and she was crowned Queen of the Romans in a ceremony at Mainz shortly after.

Matilda spent the next twelve years in the Empire, referring always to herself as Empress, but was unable to produce an heir that would secure the succession. After Henry's death in 1125, Matilda was left in the care of his nephew, Friedrich, only to be recalled to England by her father to be recognized as heir to the English throne and Duchy of Normandy.

A second marriage was arranged, this time to the young and handsome Geoffrey of Anjou. Though the pair quarrelled soon after the ceremony, they were reconciled at her father's council in 1131 and went on to have three sons: Henry, born 1133; Geoffrey, born 1134; and William, born 1136. When her father died in 1135, Matilda was in Anjou, leaving Stephen of Blois free to usurp the throne. In 1139, with the support of her half-brother, Robert of Gloucester, she sailed to England and began a nine-year campaign to reclaim her rightful inheritance.

During the ensuing civil war Matilda came close to the throne only once, at London in 1141, and returned to Normandy after the death of her beloved Gloucester in 1147. Matilda actively championed the cause of her eldest son, Henry, who ascended to the English throne and Duchy of Normandy in 1154. She spent her later years in Normandy, tirelessly supporting her son and often intervening in political affairs on his behalf, including his famous quarrel with Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. She died on 10 September 1167 and is buried at Bec Abbey in Normandy.

Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou 1113–1151

Born 24 August 1113, Geoffrey was the son of Fulk V, Count of Anjou and King of Jerusalem, and Erembourg, Countess of Maine. Nicknamed 'le bel' (handsome), Geoffrey was renowned for his good looks and military prowess. He married Matilda, daughter of Henry I and heir to the English throne, in 1128. He had three sons with Matilda and also three illegitimate children by one or more mistresses.

After the death of Henry I in 1135, he supported his wife's campaign to reclaim her inheritance and worked tirelessly to bring Normandy under Angevin control. By 1144 he had conquered the Duchy and assumed the title of Duke of Normandy – an honour he later ceded to his son, Henry. He died unexpectedly at Château-du-Loir on 7 September 1151 whilst making preparations to invade England. He is buried at St Julien's in Maine.

King Stephen c. 1092–1154

The third son of Etienne, Count of Blois, and Adela, daughter of William the Conqueror, Stephen was born in Blois in central France. He was raised at the English court of his uncle Henry I, soon becoming his favourite, and was given in marriage, Matilda of Boulogne, in 1125. After the death of William Adelin, Stephen supported Matilda's accession but in fact usurped the throne in 1135. Immediately after his coronation, the Scottish king invaded England and Stephen was forced to cede much of his northern territory.

A further invasion in 1138 resulted in an English victory at the Battle of Standard, but was followed by the defection of Robert of Gloucester and the beginnings of civil war in England. Throughout the course of his reign, Stephen was never able to overcome Matilda and was in fact captured by her forces at the Battle of Lincoln in 1141. Matilda's son, Henry, continued the fight after her departure from England in 1147. Henry's invasion and the sudden death of Stephen's son, Eustace, in 1153 paved the way for a peace settlement under which Matilda's son, Henry, inherited the throne. Stephen died on 25 October 1154 and is buried with his son at Faversham Abbey.

David I, King of Scotland c. 1085–1153

The youngest son of Malcolm III, David spent much of his youth at the court of his brother-in-law, Henry I. In 1113 he married Matilda, daughter of the Earl of Huntingdon, and succeeded to the Scottish throne on the death of his brother, Alexander, in 1124. While he promoted religious revival in Scotland, he also played an active role in English politics.

He was the first person to swear an oath of fealty to his niece, Empress Matilda, in 1127 and went to war against Stephen after the death of Henry I. Although he was defeated at the Battle of the Standard, he gained control over much of Northern England and took part in the Siege of Winchester, narrowly escaping Stephen's forces during the rout. His support for the Angevin cause continued after Matilda's departure from England and he knighted her eldest son, Henry, at Carlisle in 1149. David died on 24 May 1153 at Carlisle Castle and was succeeded by his twelve-year-old grandson, Malcolm.

Robert, Earl of Gloucester c. 1100–1147

Probably the eldest of King Henry I's illegitimate children, Robert was born some time before his father's accession in 1100. His mother's name is unknown but she was likely a member of the Gay family from Oxfordshire. A favourite of his father, Robert was given in marriage the heiress, Mabel, who brought him extensive lands in the West Country, and was made earl of Gloucester in 1121. He was a leading figure in Henry's court and actively supported the accession of his half-sister, Matilda, being one of the first men to swear loyalty to her in 1127.

When his father died in 1135, he escorted the body to Rouen and was still in Normandy as Stephen usurped the throne. Although he initially accepted Stephen's accession, he switched allegiance in 1138 and accompanied Matilda to England in the following year. From then on Robert became Matilda's military commander, masterminding her campaigns. He was captured by royal forces at the Rout of Winchester on 14 September 1141 and later released in an arrangement that also freed King Stephen. He crossed the Channel in the following year on a relief mission to Count Geoffrey but instead returned with Henry, his adolescent nephew. As the war raged on, Robert was unable to gain the upper hand over Stephen or even negotiate a peaceful settlement. He died from a fever on 31 October 1147 at Bristol and is buried at the priory church of St James.

Brian FitzCount c. 1090–?

Loyal supporter of the Empress Matilda, Brian FitzCount was the illegitimate son of Alan Fergant, Duke of Brittany. Little is known of FitzCount's early life but by 1114 he was a central figure in Henry I's household and was given in marriage Matilda, Lady of Wallingford. FitzCount swore an oath of fealty to Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, in January 1127 and escorted her to Anjou in May for her marriage to Count Geoffrey.

After the death of Henry I in 1135, FitzCount attended Stephen's Easter court but switched allegiance to Matilda when she landed in England in 1139. He was said to be 'delighted' at her arrival and would later write a treatise justifying his actions in her support. He defended his castle at Wallingford against Stephen and the Royalist army in 1139 and travelled with Matilda to London after the Battle of Lincoln. He also escorted the Empress to safety after the Battle of Winchester and spent some time with her at Oxford in 1142. He fended off another Royalist attack on Wallingford in 1146 but is rarely mentioned in the sources after this date.

Details of his final years are scant; the Abergavenny chronicler

states FitzCount went on crusade in 1147 and died in Jerusalem shortly after, while modern historians have suggested that he retired to Bec Abbey with his wife where he died in c. 1149.

Miles of Gloucester c. 1100–1143

Son of Walter, Sheriff of Gloucester, Miles was an active supporter of the Empress Matilda and he rose to prominence under Henry I. In 1121 he married Sybil, daughter of the Lord of Brecon, and inherited the title of sheriff in 1127. Miles paid homage to Stephen after his coronation in 1135 and worked in his service as a sheriff and royal justice. He also joined Stephen at the Siege of Shrewsbury in 1138.

With some persuasion from Robert of Gloucester, Miles sided with the Empress in 1139 and was an active figure in many of her campaigns, including the attack on Worcester and the relief efforts during the Siege of Wallingford. He brought Hereford under Angevin control and received it from Matilda as an earldom in 1141. During the same year he famously avoided capture by shedding his clothes and armour at the Rout of Winchester. Miles died on Christmas Eve 1143, after being struck with a stray arrow while hunting in the Forest of Dean.

Ranulf de Gernons, Earl of Chester before 1100–1153

The second earl of Chester, Ranulf was a loyal supporter of Henry I, swearing an oath to Matilda, in 1131, but he flitted between the Angevins and Royalists during the civil war. Though he married Robert of Gloucester's daughter in c.1135, he accepted Stephen's accession to the throne and was present at his Easter court in 1136.

He first rose to prominence in 1140 when he and his half-brother, William de Roumare, seized the royal castle at Lincoln. Ranulf escaped during the ensuing siege and fought against Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln. He then returned to the Royalist camp, joining Queen Matilda at the siege of Winchester, but was treated with such suspicion that he went over to the Angevins. He made peace with Stephen at Stamford in 1146, helping him capture Bedford and besiege Wallingford Castle, but was once again treated with much suspicion. Such attitudes among Stephen's barons may have contributed to his sudden arrest later that year and the surrender of his property. After his release, he mounted an armed campaign to reclaim his property, which led to four separate encounters with King Stephen and Eustace.

Ranulf sided with Henry of Anjou after the death of his father-in-law and Matilda's retirement from England. He was present at Henry's knighting ceremony at Carlisle in 1149 and played an active role in the expedition of 1153. He did not live to see Henry's accession, however, and died at Derbyshire on 17 December 1153 after drinking poisoned wine.

Henry II 1133–1189

The eldest son of Empress Matilda and Count Geoffrey of Anjou, Henry was born at Le Mans on 5 March 1133. He experienced The Anarchy during three visits to England in the 1140s when he unsuccessfully launched his first military campaign against King Stephen and was knighted by his uncle, King David. Back in France, he became Duke of Normandy in 1149 and married the French king's ex-wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in 1152. A final expedition to England in 1153 resulted in the Treaty of Winchester and brought the civil war to a peaceful end.

He was crowned King of England on 19 December 1154. Though he spent only thirteen years of his reign in England, he reorganized the judicial system and extended his Lordship into neighbouring Ireland. Henry did not become king but became overlord of Ireland – he held a significant amount of land there and therefore extended Angevin influence and control. The murder of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1170, however, would bring him into direct conflict with the English Church and result in public penance for his sins.

Henry ruled a significant empire, stretching from Ireland to the Pyrenees, but his succession policy of dividing up his territories brought him into direct conflict with his family on several occasions. The revolt of his wife and sons in 1173–4, for example, propelled his empire into outright civil war and resulted in Eleanor's arrest and permanent imprisonment. Such succession disputes continued until Henry's death on 6 July 1189 with his sons, Richard and John, in rebellion against him. He is buried at Fontevrault Abbey in Anjou.

Eleanor of Aquitaine c. 1122–1204

Eleanor was the elder daughter of Guillaume, Count of Poitou and Duke of Aquitaine. His sudden death in 1137 transformed Eleanor into the wealthiest and most desirable heiress in Medieval Europe. She married Louis VII in July 1137 but the pair were ill-matched and Louis initiated divorce proceedings in early 1152. Within months of

her divorce, however, she remarried Henry of Anjou and became Queen of England on his succession in 1154.

During the early years of the marriage, Eleanor bore five sons and three daughters and played an active role in the political affairs of her husband's great empire. After her participation in the Revolt of 1173–4, Eleanor was imprisoned by her husband and released only after his death in 1189. She resumed her political role in England and acted as regent for her son, Richard, while he was away on crusade. After his death and the succession of her youngest son, John, in 1199, she left England and spent her final years in Aquitaine, still active in family and political affairs. She died on 1 April 1204 and is buried beside Henry at Fontevrault Abbey.

Appendix 2: Timeline of The Medieval Anarchy

1100

5 August: Henry I is crowned King of England at Westminster Abbey

1102

c. *7 February*: Birth of Matilda, daughter of Henry I

1110

February: Matilda travels to the German Court to marry Henry V

1120

25 November: The *White Ship* disaster; Death of William Adelin, heir to the throne

1121

29 January: Marriage of Henry I and Adeliza of Louvain

1126

Matilda returns to England after the death of Henry V

1127

January: First oath of fealty sworn to Matilda

1128

17 June: Marriage of Matilda and Geoffrey Plantagenet; Second oath of fealty is sworn to Matilda

1131

Third oath of fealty sworn to Matilda

1133

5 March: Birth of Henry Plantagenet, son of Matilda and Geoffrey

1135

1 December: Death of Henry I
22 December: Stephen is crowned King of England

1138

May: Defection of Robert, Earl of Gloucester, from Stephen to Matilda
10 June: Scots defeat the English at the Battle of Clitheroe
22 August: English defeat the Scots at the Battle of the Standard

1139

30 September: Matilda and her supporters arrive in England
7 November: Robert of Gloucester sacks the city of Worcester

1141

2 February: Battle of Lincoln; King Stephen captured

14 September: Rout of Winchester
November: Prisoner exchange of King Stephen and Robert of Gloucester

1142

September–December: Siege of Oxford
November: Henry of Anjou's first visit to England

1143

1 July: Battle of Wilton

1145

Siege of Faringdon

1147

Henry of Anjou's second visit to England
31 October: Death of Robert, Earl of Gloucester

1149

22 May: Henry of Anjou is knighted by King David

1151

7 September: Death of Geoffrey of Anjou

1152

18 May: Marriage of Henry of Anjou and Eleanor of Aquitaine

1153

17 August: Death of Eustace of Boulogne
6 November: Treaty of Winchester is ratified

1154

25 October: Death of King Stephen
19 December: Henry of Anjou is crowned King Henry II of England

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